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ABSTRACT

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Running head: NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR DROP OUT AND VIOLENCE

A Comprehensive Needs Assessment to Facilitate Prevention of School Drop Out and Violence

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Abstract

The present study addresses school violence and school drop out and proposes that the underlying factor of school connectedness/school climate should guide preventive and intervention efforts. Data were gathered from five schools in a small city school district in north Georgia. Group and individual interviews served as the basis for constructing a 78 item district-wide survey administered to 304 school employees. Data are presented on individual items from the survey, mean scale scores reflecting the five areas of the survey and a principal components analysis. Differences between scale scores were noted as a function of whether respondents were from central office, elementary or secondary schools. The five scales were moderately correlated ranging from .389 to .695. Principal components analysis reveals five distinct factors of school connectedness/positive school climate, causes of disruptive or violent behavior, causes of school completion or school disengagement, interventions for drop out and interventions for disruptive or violent behavior. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

A Comprehensive Needs Assessment to Facilitate Prevention of School Drop Out and Violence

Ecological models and prior research suggest that violence and drop out are long-term processes involving multiple levels of influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Coie, Lochman, Terry, & Hyman, 1992; Finn, 1993; Grannis, 1991; Tolan & Guerra, 1994). The literature on violence and drop out prevention shows considerable overlap regarding the factors contributing to these problems and recommendations for interventions. However, rarely are these two problems conceptualized together in theory and research. The common risk factors between these two problems suggest there may be certain underlying factors related to these problems. The present study contributes to current literature in three ways. First, violence and drop out are explicitly conceptualized as problems with overlapping causal factors. Second, perceptions about violence and school drop out as well as suggestions for interventions will add to what is currently known about violence prevention and drop out prevention. Third, the present study details an approach to conduct and use a comprehensive needs assessment to guide the implementation of preventive interventions.

Risk factors for drop out include tardiness, chronic absenteeism, truancy, suspensions and expulsions, retention, socioeconomic status, minority status, disability status, mobility, negative family interactions, behavior problems, academic problems, sense of alienation and disengagement from school, and poor peer acceptance (Barton, Watkins, & Jarjoura, 1997; Kortering, Hess, & Braziel, 1997; Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998). Risk factors for violence include: social withdrawal, feelings of isolation, peer rejection, being a victim of violence, poor academic performance, expression of violence in writing and drawings, behavior problems, impaired cognitive functioning, interpersonal skills deficits, intolerance for differences, uncontrolled anger, low self-esteem, poor parental problem solving and anger

management, SES and minority status (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998; Tolan & Guerra, 1994; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). Examination of research on risk factors for drop out and violence reveals many overlapping factors. These factors include: lack of school interest or engagement, social withdrawal, academic difficulties, poor peer acceptance, behavior/discipline problems, SES and minority status. It has been suggested that when background variables such as socioeconomic status are controlled, ethnic background is not predictive of drop out (Kaufman & Bradby, 1992; Rumberger, 1995). Current research about violence prevention recommends that programs targeting violence prevention include components to increase understanding and acceptance of diversity, improve school climate and safety, improve interpersonal relationships among students and between students and educators, promote clear and consistent rules, and include parent and community involvement (Furlong, Morrison, Chung, Bates, & Morrison, 1997). Considering the overlap between the risk factors of drop out and violence, it follows that these interventions are important factors for decreasing school drop out as well.

Tolan and Guerra (1994) conceptualize violence intervention efforts as addressing the the individual, close interpersonal relations, proximal social context, and societal macrosystems. Interventions focused on the individual comprise a majority of violence prevention approaches and include programs that target individual psychological processes using psychotherapy, behavior modification, cognitive behavior interventions, social skills training, social casework and biomedical methods. The second level of influence, interpersonal relations, is addressed primarily through family and peer group interventions. Of these interventions, Tolan and Guerra (1994) report that family therapy and related interventions have generally been more effective than peer group interventions in decreasing violent behavior. The level of proximal social contexts encompasses programs within schools, neighborhoods, and residential programs.

According to Tolan and Guerra (1994), research concerning the efficacy of programs addressing this level of influence remains largely uncertain. The level of social macrosystems includes changes in social policy, legal changes or social value changes. Tolan and Guerra (1994) suggested that affecting children's level of exposure to violence through media and decreasing access to guns are two components that have the potential to reduce youth violence.

Previous research has indicated that preventive interventions aimed at reducing school violence and drop out are more likely to be effective by simultaneously addressing several levels of influence (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Coie et al., 1992). In order to develop effective prevention programs based on such models, we must understand perceptions of violence and school drop out held by key members of relevant environments such as educators, parents and students. Furlong et al. (1997) suggest conducting a needs assessment that surveys students, parents and employees as an essential action for reducing school violence. The current investigation was designed to obtain information about the perceptions held by members of these groups.

Rappaport (1981) proposed that empowerment theory can be a sound tool for promoting social change by emphasizing the needs of the community and the ability of community members to solve their own problems. In addition, empowerment has been proposed as a framework to facilitate implementation of prevention programs within the schools (Meyers & Nastasi, 1999). The present study draws on empowerment theory by asking educators to both identify and generate solutions to problems that would later be implemented within their own schools.

Similar to empowerment theory, constructivism has been proposed as a useful framework for consultation in school settings (Sandoval, 1996; Henning-Stout, 1994). Constructivism asserts that knowledge is constructed by the individual by interacting within a social context. As

a result, knowledge can be discovered by individuals (i.e. educators, parents, students) and supported by others in the environment (i.e. consultants/researchers) (Glassman, 1993). Constructivist theory supports our emphasis on the role of community in shaping school-based interventions. One goal of the needs assessment is to explicitly engage the school community in actively shaping an intervention rather than having an intervention imposed externally.

Our approach to collaborative action research has also been referred to as "participatory action research" (Greenwood, Whyte, & Harkavy, 1993; Nastasi, 1998; Schensul & Schensul, 1992). This approach solicits involvement of key stakeholders in developing questions, designing data collection strategies and analyzing/interpreting data using a recursive process where information that is collected early during research is used to formulate approaches to data collection, analysis and interpretation later in the research process. This research process is viewed as a consultation method that can help to create important changes in relevant settings (Nastasi, Varjas, Berstein, & Jayasena, 2000). Our use of a needs assessment as part of a preventive intervention supports the goal of promoting intervention acceptability (Nastasi, Varjas, Schensul, Shensul, Silva, & Ratnayake, 2000).

Method

Context

Data were gathered from five schools grouped developmentally in a small city school district in north Georgia. The three elementary schools are grouped pre-K – grade 1, grades 2 – 3, and grades 4 – 5. There is one middle school, grades 6 – 8, and one high school, grades 9 – 12. Approximately 71% of students receive free and reduced lunch. The population within the schools is roughly one third African American, one third Caucasian, and one third Hispanic. The district agreed to work collaboratively with a local university in a multi-year violence prevention

project. This needs assessment was conducted simultaneous to piloting some of the intervention strategies at one of the elementary schools in an effort to obtain feedback to help shape the intervention by meeting local needs. Needs assessment data were compiled from students, parents, and school personnel through group interviews, individual interviews, and a district-wide survey.

Participants

Participants in group interviews included 3 groups of students (one each from the 4-5 elementary school, middle school and high school), 3 groups of teachers (2 from the 4-5 elementary school and one from the high school), and 3 groups of student support team members (one each from the 4-5 elementary school, middle school, and high school).

Participants in the individual interviews included 30 teachers (6 from each of the five schools), 3 administrators (one from each of the elementary schools), and 9 parents (all from the 4-5 elementary school). Participants in the district-wide survey included 304 employees across five schools and the administrative office for a return rate of 59%. The employees participating in the survey included both certified and non-certified personnel, such as teachers, teacher assistants, counselors, school specialists, administrative staff, clerical staff, cafeteria employees, and bus drivers.

Two distinct processes of data collection are outlined below. The preliminary data collection describes the procedures for conducting and analyzing the group and individual interviews. These preliminary data are the basis for construction of the district-wide survey. Discussion of preliminary data collection and analysis provides details about procedures for construction of the district-wide survey and further validates the survey as an appropriate method of assessing the perceptions of this sample. Because the survey reflects the important themes that

emerged from the interviews, it provides information about the results of these interviews. However, the primary focus of this paper is to report the results obtained from administering a survey that was grounded in interview data.

Preliminary Data Sources

Group Interviews. Nine group interviews were conducted at one elementary school, the middle school, and high school. Two trained interviewers were present in each group interview. Groups ranged from 4 to 10 individuals. Group interviews used six open-ended questions. The groups took place in a conference room at the school and lasted 50 minutes to one hour. Group interviews were tape-recorded with permission and transcribed. Group interview questions targeted perceptions of behavior problems and violence, community involvement, discipline procedures for violent incidents, and family involvement. Interview protocols are available upon request from the author.

Individual interviews. Forty-two individual interviews were conducted across all five schools. Trained interviewers conducted interviews using seven open-ended questions that were developed based on themes that emerged in the group interviews. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and took place in a conference room, in the participant's office, or in an empty classroom. Interviews of parents took place at the grades 4-5 elementary school. The interviews were taped with permission and transcribed. The interviews that were not taped (n = 5) were transcribed from the interviewer's notes. Individual interview questions targeted perceptions of behavior problems and violence, factors that place students at risk for drop out, methods to support students placed at risk for drop out, cliques, student connectedness to the school and to teachers, parent involvement, and school discipline.

Analysis of Preliminary Interview Data

Analysis of group interviews. Each pair of interviewers transcribed their own interviews. Coding used methods of constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Initially each pair of interviewers developed a list of themes derived from their interviews. Coders (two of the interviewers) compiled the nine lists of themes into a "master" theme list, which combined all the themes according to major themes and sub-themes. The pair of coders then worked together to code one transcript. They reached agreement on any discrepancies and modified the category codes as appropriate. The remaining interviews were divided between the two coders and coded individually. After all the transcripts were coded, a team consisting of the two coders, another researcher, and the director of the project reviewed the coding scheme. This team decided to collapse several categories in the coding scheme to make the coding more understandable. The interviews were then coded a second time by the two coders (each rating interviews she had not rated before). Coders reached agreement on any discrepancies.

Analysis of individual interviews. Individual interviews were also coded using methods of constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) using similar procedures and making use of the prior coding completed with the group interviews. The same two graduate students that coded the group interviews reviewed the individual interviews and compiled a list of themes. All individual interviewers then reviewed the themes generated by the coders for their particular interviews and provided feedback to the coders. They reached agreement on any discrepancies. The coders then coded one transcript together and reached agreement on any discrepancies. The rest of the interviews were divided and coded separately.

Needs Assessment Data Source

Survey. Major themes and sub-themes that emerged during the analysis of preliminary data were the basis for the needs assessment survey. The survey consisted of 78 Likert items with 5 possible responses; "not at all important," "slightly important," "moderately important," "important" and "very important." These questions targeted perceptions of factors that contribute to school completion, methods to support students placed at risk of dropping out, factors that contribute to disruptive and violent behavior, methods to reduce disruptive and violent behavior, and factors that help students feel connected with the school and with teachers. These survey data were then analyzed quantitatively by assigning each response a point value from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all important, 2 = slightly important, 3 = moderately important, 4 = important, 5 = very important). Mean values and standard deviation are reported for each item in Table 1. Several respondents omitted demographic questions. However, available information indicated that approximately 82% of the respondents were female, and 16% male. Approximately 76% of the respondents were Caucasian, 11 % African American, 5% Hispanic, 2% Asian American, and 3% Other.

Results

As noted in the methods, the survey elicited perceptions of school staff in five areas: contributions to children dropping out or completing school, contributions to disruptive or violent behavior in school, interventions for children placed at risk of dropping out of school, interventions for reducing disruptive or violent behavior in school, and what promotes school connectedness. The results are presented in three sections. The first presents data based on individual items from the survey, and the second section presents data based on mean scale

scores reflecting the five areas of the survey. The third section describes a principal components analysis to provide more information about the psychometric properties of the scale. Information from the principal components analysis is then used to guide a proposed revision of the scale for use in future data collection.

Data Derived from Individual Survey Items

A complete list of mean scores for all items is included in Table 1. The results for these items are reported separately for each of the five areas of the survey. An overview of the findings presented in Table 1 suggests that there was generally high agreement among participants that the survey items are viewed as important. As a result, for each area of the survey we discuss briefly the five most highly rated items, as well any items that were rated as less than important (3.5 or below).

Insert Table 1 here

Items Related to Drop out. The following items were viewed as particularly important elements as to whether children complete school. parental support/supervision at home (mean = 4.95, SD = .31), school attendance (mean = 4.65, SD = .58), role models (mean = 4.61, SD = .62), gang involvement (mean = 4.51, SD = .87), and self esteem (mean = 4.39, SD = .75). Four items from this area of the survey were rated as relatively less important (i.e., 3.5 or below). These items included: students with disabilities (mean = 2.91, SD = 1.15), students who have been retained (mean 3.22, SD = 1.16), students who are ethnic minority group members (mean = 2.65, SD = 1.28), and socioeconomic status (mean = 2.88, SD = 1.12).

Items Related to Violence. Participants were asked to rate the importance of certain items as they contribute to disruptive or violent behavior in the school. The five items that were rated

as most important include: disrespect for authority (mean = 4.60, SD = .72, lack of parent support/involvement (mean = 4.38, SD = .93), poor anger management skills (mean = 4.31, SD = .85), disrespect for peers (mean = 4.23, SD = .85), and lack of academic interest (mean = 4.18, SD = .89). Three items from this area of the survey were rated as relatively less important (i.e., 3.5 or below). These include: racial and ethnic differences (mean = 3.36, SD = 1.23), lack of support for slow learners (mean = 3.5, SD = 1.29), and socioeconomic status (mean = 3.12, SD = 1.07).

Interventions for Drop out. The five most highly rated interventions for increasing school completion include increasing motivation (mean = 4.69, SD = .56), notifying parents of a late or absent student (mean = 4.44, SD = .79), providing emotional support (mean = 4.41, SD = .77), lower student/teacher ratio (mean = 4.38, SD = .89) and teaching conflict resolution skills (mean = 4.36, SD = .84). One item from this area of the survey was rated as relatively less important (i.e., 3.5 or below): school personnel visiting the home (mean = 3.34, SD = 1.17).

Interventions for Violence. The five interventions rated as most important for reducing disruptive and violent behavior include: parent contact, phone calls or conferences (mean = 4.55, SD = .78), punishment or consequences (mean = 4.49, SD = .84), teaching problem solving skills (mean = 4.31, SD = .92), rewarding positive behavior (mean = 4.23, SD = .93) and individual teacher/student time (mean = 4.23, SD = .86). It is noteworthy that schools working with law enforcement (mean = 4.19, SD = .96) and mentoring (mean = 4.17, SD = .92) were also rated as quite important. None of the items from this area of the survey were rated below 3.5.

School Connectedness. Educators were asked to rate ways that help students feel connected with school and with teachers. The five items that were rated as most important include: caring teacher attitude (mean 4.80, SD = .50), student feels someone really cares for

them (mean = 4.79, SD = .50), student feels safe at school (mean = 4.69, SD = .57), student has an adult at school they can go to with a problem (mean = 4.66, SD = .61), and a friendly, positive school climate (mean = 4.60, SD = .64). None of the items from this area of the survey were rated below 3.5.

Data Based on Scale Scores

Scale scores were computed for each of the five areas referred to above: Items Related to Drop out, Items Related to Violence, Interventions for Drop out, Interventions for Violence, and School Connectedness. The means for each subscale were calculated by totaling the ratings for each scale and dividing by the number of items on each scale. A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to determine whether there were differences in the five subscale means as a function of whether respondents were elementary school, secondary school, or central office employees. The group means for each scale are reported in Table 2. The multivariate F was significant for each scale; Items Related to Drop out $F(2,301) = 15.56$, $p < .001$, Items Related to Violence $F(2, 301) = 10.39$, $p < .001$, Interventions for Drop out $F(2,301) = 9.143$, $p < .001$, Interventions for Violence $F(2,301) = 8.48$, $p < .001$, and School Connectedness $F(2,301) = 17.21$, $p < .001$.

Insert Table 2 here

Post hoc analysis showed that the significant findings for Items Related to Drop out occurred because central office staff (4.18) rated these items as significantly more important than elementary school staff (3.97), and elementary school staff rated these items as significantly more important secondary school staff (3.80). The ratings for central office (4.19) were significantly higher on Items Related to Violence than both elementary school staff (3.89) and

secondary school staff (3.77). On Interventions for Drop Out, central office (4.22) and elementary school staff ratings (4.24) were significantly higher than secondary school staff ratings (3.96). Both central office (4.26) and elementary school staff (4.17) rated Interventions for Violence higher than secondary school staff (3.91). On the School Connectedness subscale, both central office (4.46) and elementary school staff (4.49) rated items higher than secondary school staff (4.18). Further post hoc analysis was done to examine differences in the subscale means. The mean of items on the School Connectedness scale (4.38) was significantly higher than the means for Interventions for Drop Out (4.15) and Interventions for Violence (4.10), which in turn were higher than Items Related to Drop Out (3.96) and Items Related to Violence (3.92).

The five scales were correlated to determine the degree of relatedness between individual scales. It was found that scales correlated moderately, ranging from a correlation of .389 between Items Related to Violence and Interventions for Drop Out to a correlation of .695 between School Connectedness and Interventions for Drop Out. Correlations between subscales are included in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 here

Principal Components Analysis

Data were analyzed using a Principal Components Analysis to learn more about the psychometric properties of the scale. Initially all items were included in a Principal Components Analysis using a Varimax rotation. The analysis was limited to five factors based on the original construction of the survey into five sections. All items with less than .400 loading on one of five factors were eliminated. The Principal Components analysis was conducted again using the

remaining items. This process was repeated (6 times) until 50% of the variance was accounted for by the remaining items. Next, each item that was eliminated based on the principal components analysis was examined individually based on both the item content and factor loading. A final set of items was selected that most accurately reflected the content of each factor. The Principal Components analysis was conducted one final time with the revised scale content. Total variance accounted for by the revised scale was 43%. Each factor is discussed below. See Table 4.

Insert Table 4 here

Factor one, "school connectedness/positive school climate," highlighted positive relationships with educators or other adults, academic and emotional support for students, teaching and rewarding social skills and contact with parents. This factor has 15 items that loaded above .445. See Table 4. Examples of items that helped best define this scale include: student feels someone really cares for them (.799), caring teacher attitude (.691), friendly, positive school climate (.669), teach conflict resolutions skills (.623), emotional support (.613) and student feels safe at school (.540).

The second factor, "causes of disruptive or violent behavior" (15 items), included items focused on lack of involvement or interest in school activities, disrespect for peers and adults, lack of emotional coping skills, and impact of external forces such as gangs, peer pressure and media influences. Examples of items from this factor include: disrespect for peers (.719), poor anger management skills (.577), gangs (.541) and lack of role models in the community (.530).

The "causes of school drop out or school completion" factor (9 items) focused on things that would enable or hinder success in school such as early reading achievement, English language proficiency, and having a disability or being retained. Examples of items include:

student is an ethnic minority (.692), student has been retained (.648), socioeconomic status (.546) and academic success (.525).

The "interventions for disruptive or violent behavior" factor (8 items) generally reflects punishment or negative consequences and involvement of law enforcement and the court system. Examples of items include: in or out of school suspension (.713), utilizing district support personnel (.601), juvenile court (.612) and punishment or consequences (.591).

The "interventions for drop out" factor (7 items) highlighted interventions for increasing engagement in school through school-based academic interventions and mentoring. Improved support for parents and expansion of vocational programs were also included. Examples of items in this factors include: a mentoring program (.574), after school academic help (.506), role models (.510) and a parent resource center/family education (.483).

Discussion

There was generally a high degree of agreement among raters across items, which may be due partly to the collaborative action research methods used to construct the survey. Themes coded from both the group and individual interviews were used to develop the survey items and this may have contributed to the high agreement among survey respondents.

Our findings show that perceptions of school staff generally support risk factors cited in the literature, such as parent support, academic success, social skills and school attendance being important factors related to school completion (Barton et al., 1997; Kortering et al. 1997; Sinclair et al., 1998). However some items that have been cited as risk factors in the literature were rated by school personnel as relatively less important compared to other risk factors. These items included socioeconomic status, retention, having a disability and minority group status. Perhaps these relatively lower ratings occurred because these items were viewed as "static variables" that cannot be changed. Further, the survey itself asked about effective interventions and this may

have focused respondents' attention on variables that can be changed readily rather those that cannot. Further research is needed to replicate and explain these findings.

Our data show that educator perceptions support many research findings about interventions for drop out and violence. For example, mentoring programs, family involvement, instruction in conflict resolution and problem solving skills, and increasing positive relationships with school were viewed by educators as being highly effective interventions. These interventions are also supported by current research (Sinclair et al., 1998; Tolan & Guerra, 1994; Epstein, 1995).

Generally, the central office and elementary school groups viewed items related to drop out and violence, interventions for these problems and variables related to school connectedness as more important than the secondary school group. The difference in ratings between elementary and secondary school may be attributed to the notion that smaller schools have a higher degree of cohesiveness among members. Literature supports smaller groups as being more cohesive, more interested in the activities of the group and as receiving more satisfaction within the group (Barker and Gump 1964). Higher overall survey ratings by elementary and central office respondents could occur because people working within these smaller settings may have generally positive views that result in greater consensus about the potential to implement effective preventive interventions. There may also be developmental factors accounting for these differences such as the increasing importance in adolescence of variables external to the school and home (i.e. the growing role of the peer group and identify formation) (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). The relatively high ratings by central office staff may be explained by the fact that some of the central office staff were promoting the implementation of a drop out and violence prevention program. Also, since most of the central office staff do not confront daily behavior

problems from the same group of students like a classroom teacher does, they may be more optimistic on a range of variables that might be connected to drop out and violence. Further research is needed to explore and elaborate on these findings and explanations (such as size, depersonalization, school structure) concerning the difference in perceptions between these groups (i.e. central office, elementary and secondary). Confirmed differences in perceptions between level of school personnel may have implications for considering the acceptability of interventions by level (Elliot, Witt & Kratochwill, 1991).

This paper illustrates the utility of a needs assessment in developing consensus about the factors related to school drop out, violence, and school connectedness that can be useful in designing interventions. School personnel are increasingly being called on to prevent problems by arranging, implementing, and evaluating preventive activities in the schools (Meyers & Nastasi, 1999). Preventive interventions that include input from participants are likely to have high treatment acceptability (Elliott et al., 1991; Truscott, Cosgrove, Meyers, & Eidle-Barkman, 2000). This paper highlights the benefits of conducting a needs assessment and using collaborative action research methodologies in developing intervention programs. We have produced a useful tool based on input from educators, students and parents that may facilitate understanding about perceptions of violence and drop out in the school, influence program implementation, and increase intervention acceptability. The relatively small sample size is a limitation to generalizing these results to other populations. Further research is needed to provide information about drop out prevention, violence prevention and school climate with other populations across settings. In this context, the survey may be useful to researchers and practitioners doing school-based work in this area.

The needs assessment methods presented in this paper can be a useful tool in the consultation process and the instrument that was developed can facilitate consultation about school drop out, violence and/or school climate. This would result in data to identify goals and objectives that can be used to construct effective interventions. In addition, this type of needs assessment can be used as a compliance evaluation technique, to determine how well current programs and interventions fit within the present system (Perkins, 1977).

The following examples from our methods illustrate how the use of collaborative action research methods can maximize participant input in the needs assessment process and program implementation. Collaboration with the district during initial stages of project planning and initial needs assessment interviews indicated that the high school was particularly concerned about increasing rates of drop out and was specifically interested in addressing school drop out. Further, they were concerned that our interview questions had over-emphasized violence. After meeting with concerned educators from the high school, we changed the individual interview questions and expanded the needs assessment survey to increase emphasis on drop out prevention strategies.

Another example of the impact of the collaborative action research method is that these survey results helped to improve our preventive interventions. Ninety-eight percent of survey respondents indicated that parental support/supervision at home was "very important" for children to behave non-violently and complete school. As a result, we expanded the parent involvement component of the program. Parent letters were sent home to inform parents of interventions within the school environment and provided suggestions for practicing skills being taught to the children in school (such as empathy, impulse control and anger management). Information sessions were provided which allowed parents to see and discuss aspects of the

curriculum. We have expanded the role of monitors (based on Check and Connect, Evelo, Sinclair, Hurley, Christenson, and Thurlow, 1995) to increase focus on parents of students placed at risk for drop out and violence

One focus of this research was to find out if there is overlap between causes and interventions for drop out and violence. Results show that while there is some overlap between perceptions of these problems, there are also ways that these are viewed as distinct problems. Data support overlap in respondents' views of school violence and drop out. The original scales on the survey were designed to reflect perceptions of the causes of school drop out and violence, interventions to prevent school drop out and violence, and ways to increase school connectedness. Based on our strong methods in developing the survey, these scales had good face validity. Nevertheless, there was substantial overlap between these scales as evidenced by correlations of .504 between causes of dropout and causes of violence, and .656 between interventions for drop out and interventions for violence. Further, the principal components analysis yielded a strong factor of school connectedness/school climate that drew from each scale on the original survey. Three items on the "causes of school disengagement" factor loaded on the "causes of disruptive behavior or violence" factor, providing additional evidence for overlap between perceptions of causes of these problems. The overlap between scales and across factors provides support for conceptualizing drop out prevention and violence prevention programs together in research and in practice.

In initial stages of data collection, we hypothesized that the causes of drop out and violence would be viewed as overlapping, and therefore, we suspected that the interventions for these problems would be viewed as overlapping as well. However, despite the evidence that there was some overlap, the principal components analysis also indicated important ways in

which these are viewed as distinct problems. There was no overlap between the "interventions for drop out" factor and the "interventions for disruptive or violent behavior" factor. The interventions for school drop out include academic interventions, mentoring and parent support while interventions for disruptive or violent behavior reflect punishment as well consequences such as juvenile court. One interpretation of these findings is that when asked how to support students placed at risk for dropping out respondents gave preventive suggestions for a problem that is viewed to occur in the future (i.e., primary and secondary prevention), while when asked how to reduce disruptive or violent behavior, respondents generated remedial solutions to the existing behavioral problems that they confront (i.e., tertiary prevention). While we think these make contribution to the literature, it should be noted that the suggestions for intervention tended to be remedial in nature rather than preventive, which was the intent of the research. Future data collection about interventions for disruptive or violent behavior should consider that suggestions for interventions may be greatly influenced by whether respondents are lead to consider primary, secondary or tertiary prevention solutions.

A factor that emerged strongly throughout the needs assessment was the importance of school connectedness/positive school climate. Principal components analysis of the data highlights the "connectedness/positive school climate" factor in relation to the problems of drop out and violence. Provided that additional research supports conceptualizing lack of school connectedness/positive school climate as contributing to school drop out and violence, preventive interventions could address both problems simultaneously by targeting interventions to increase student connectedness with the school and positive school climate.

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Table 1

District-Wide Means of Individual Items for Each Scale

(n = 304)

Items Related to Drop Out	Mean	SD
Contributors to School Completion		
Parental support/supervision at home	4.95	.31
Role models	4.61	.62
Academic success	4.36	.65
Early reading achievement	4.32	.77
Social skills	4.13	.79
Socioeconomic status	2.88	1.12
Self-esteem	4.39	.75
English language proficiency	3.89	.95
School attendance	4.65	.58
Contributors to School Drop Out		
Student with a disability	2.92	1.15
Student that has been retained	3.22	1.16
Student is an ethnic minority	2.65	1.28
Gang involvement	4.51	.87

Items Related to Violence	Mean	SD
Racial and ethnic differences	3.36	1.23
Children with behavior disorders	4.00	1.07
Lack of support for slow learners	3.50	1.29
Disrespect for authority	4.60	.72
Lack of self-esteem or confidence	4.09	.98
Peer pressure	4.06	1.01
Gangs	3.90	1.32
Drug use	3.74	1.44
Emotional immaturity	4.08	.91
Media (radio, TV, news, movies, sports)	3.85	1.14
Lack of role models in the community	3.69	1.16
Lack of academic interest	4.18	.89
Socioeconomic status	3.12	1.07
Poor anger management skills	4.31	.85
Disrespect for peers	4.23	.85
Cliques or groups of children	3.71	1.05
Lack of involvement in school activities	3.65	1.07
Parent support/involvement	4.38	.93
Leadership by the Principal	3.97	1.26

Interventions for Dropout	Mean	SD
After school academic help	4.25	.88
A mentoring program	4.14	.91
A parent resource center/family education	3.91	1.01
Parent support groups	3.88	.99
Parent notified of late or absent students	4.44	.79
School personnel visiting the home	3.34	1.17
Lower student/teacher ratio	4.38	.89
Expand vocational training programs	4.22	.83
Vocational training prior to high school	3.52	1.18
Special Education services	4.26	.88
Increase acceptance of varied cultures	4.07	1.05
Student Support Team	3.99	1.00
After school programs, sports or clubs	4.29	.78
Additional support for ESL students	4.11	.94
Teach problem solving skills	4.36	.76
Teach conflict resolution skills	4.36	.84
Emotional support	4.41	.77
Motivation	4.69	.56

Interventions for Violence	Mean	SD
Teaching problem solving skills	4.31	.92
Character education classes	3.84	1.13
Opportunity room/time-out	4.00	1.13
Parent contact, phone calls or conferences	4.55	.78
Rewarding positive behavior	4.23	.93
Utilizing district support personnel (i.e. social worker, school psychologist, etc.)	4.06	1.07
In or out of school suspension	4.15	1.02
Juvenile court	3.79	1.21
Individual teacher/student time	4.23	.86
School working with law enforcement	4.19	.96
Organized after-school programs	4.01	.94
Mentoring	4.17	.92
Staff development	3.82	1.03
Behavior contracts	3.68	1.07
Punishment or consequences	4.49	.84

School Connectedness	Mean	SD
Caring teacher attitude	4.80	.50
Teacher contact with parents	4.48	.69
Participation in after school activities	3.93	.89
Displaying children's work	4.00	.93
Student feels safe at school	4.69	.57
Student feels someone really cares for them	4.79	.50
Student has an adult at school they can go to with a problem	4.66	.61
Parent involvement in school activities	4.41	.76
Strong positive relationship with an educator	4.47	.72
Programs put on by students for parents	3.78	.99
Friendly, positive school climate	4.60	.64
Teachers show interest in students' activities outside of school	3.87	.95
Student has someone they can look up to	4.52	.68

Note. Mean calculated from a 5 point Likert type scale: 1 = not at all important, 2 = slightly important, 3 = moderately important, 4 = important, 5 = very important.

Table 2

Mean Scale Scores by Group

	Elementary (n = 141) Mean (SD)	Secondary (n = 99) Mean (SD)	Central Office (n = 64) Mean (SD)
Items Related to Dropout	3.97 (.43)	3.80 (.39)	4.18 (.50)
Items Related to Violence	3.89 (.68)	3.77 (.45)	4.19 (.53)
Interventions for Dropout	4.24 (.54)	3.96 (.50)	4.22 (.50)
Interventions for Violence	4.17 (.63)	3.91 (.53)	4.26 (.62)
School Connectedness	4.49 (.37)	4.18 (.51)	4.46 (.38)

Table 3

Correlations between Subscales

	Items Related to Dropout	Items Related to Violence	Interventions for Drop Out	Interventions for Violence	School Connectedness
Items Related to Drop Out	1.00	.504*	.498*	.478*	.461*
Items Related to Violence	.504*	1.00	.389*	.489*	.390*
Interventions for Drop Out	.498*	.389*	1.00	.656*	.695*
Interventions for Violence	.478*	.489*	.656*	1.00	.605*
School Connectedness	.461*	.390*	.695*	.605*	1.00

* $p < .001$

Table 4

Proposed Needs Assessment Revision based on Principal Components Analysis with Factor Loadings

(total items = 54)

Factor I - School Connectedness/Positive School Climate

	Loading
Student feels someone really cares for them	.799
Student had an adult at school they can go to with a problem	.793
Strong positive relationships with an educator	.759
Caring teacher attitude	.691
Friendly, positive school climate	.669
Teach conflict resolution	.623
Emotional support	.613
Teach problem solving skills	.609
Student has someone they can look up to	.579
Student feels safe at school	.540
Teachers show interest in students' activities outside of school	.538
Individual teacher/student time	.487
Motivation	.461
Rewarding positive behavior	.451
Teacher contact with parents	.432

Factor II - Causes of Disruptive or Violent Behavior

	Loading
Disrespect for peers	.719
Disrespect for authority	.651
Lack of involvement in school activities	.591
Poor anger management skills	.577
Emotional immaturity	.568
Gangs	.541
Children with behavior disorders	.538
Lack of role models in the community	.530
Drug Use	.513
Cliques or groups of children	.504
Racial and ethnic differences	.497
Lack of academic interest	.497
Peer Pressure	.464
Parent support/involvement	.448
Media (radio, TV, news, movies, sports)	.416

Factor III - Causes of School Disengagement/Drop Out

	Loading
Student is an ethnic minority	.692
Student has been retained	.648
Socioeconomic status	.546
Academic success	.525
English language proficiency	.521
Student with a disability	.518
Lack of support for slow learners	.482
Early reading achievement	.478
Lack of self-esteem or confidence	.409

Factor IV - Interventions for Disruptive or Violent Behavior

	Loading
In or out of school suspension	.713
Juvenile court	.612
Utilizing district support personnel (i.e. social worker, school psychologist, etc.)	.601
Punishment or consequences	.591
School working with law enforcement	.585
Opportunity room/time-out	.558
Parent contact, phone calls or conferences	.544
Behavior contracts	.470

Factor V- Interventions for Dropout

	Loading
A mentoring program	.574
After school academic help	.506
Role Models	.510
A parent resource center/family education	.483
Parent support groups	.472
Expand vocational training programs	.465
After school programs, sports or clubs	.352